

America will miss the Honorable Verda Freeman Welcome; the first African-American female in the United States to win a seat in a state Senate.

Not only should Marylanders in particular pay tribute to this distinguished American, but the citizens of this country should recognize the calibre of woman that she was.

In 1907, she was born high up in the Blue Ridge Mountains in the town of Uree, North Carolina, known commonly as Lake Lure. She was the third child of a family of 16 from John Freeman and Docia Freeman.

Upon the death of her mother early in Verda's childhood, she often found herself taking care of her younger brothers and sisters while attending classes at night to pursue her education. *APR. 28 1990*

Growing up in a period of economic and social unrest in this country, she overcame many obstacles and pursued her aspirations to become one of Maryland's most respected and leading citizens, while serving in both the Maryland House of Delegates and the Maryland State Senate. *AFRO-AMERICAN*

After witnessing her father repeatedly denied from the voting polls, she resolved at an early age that "when I grow up, I'm going to vote," but it was her deep compassion to help those less fortunate, as she had done as a child, that propelled her into public life.

In 1929 Verda came to Baltimore and graduated three years later from the Coppin Normal School with a teaching certificate, and worked for 11 years as a teacher in the Baltimore City Schools. She went on to receive a bachelor's degree in history from my alma mater, Morgan State University in 1939, and in 1943 completed a masters degree in history from New York University.

The grandeur of Verda Welcome is that she lived her life by example and encouraged us all to stand up and fight for what is right. As early as the 1940's, she worked to register African-Americans to vote and encouraged participation in the political process. *APR. 28 1990*

During the 1950's, she led the way in efforts to remove the racial barriers at the White Coffee Pot, a Baltimore eatery and other businesses in the area. Her efforts led her to become an active leader in the civil rights struggle during the 1960's.

Verda decided to run for the Maryland House of Delegates and was elected in 1958. After serving in



## Verda Welcome remembered

the House for four years, she went on to become the first African-American woman in the history of this nation to hold a seat in a state senate.

She quickly became a respected leader in the Senate and continued the fight to remove racial barriers and social inequality for the next 20 years.

While serving in the Maryland General Assembly, she authored legislation entitled the "Public Accommodations Bill," which upheld the personal and public dignity of all people to rent a room or enjoy their meal in an appropriate environment without regard to race.

As a state senator, she helped to eliminate the state's century old miscegenation law; and sponsored bills providing for equal pay for equal work, gun control, and voter registration by mail.

Senator Verda Welcome also led the initiative when Morgan State received university status, which elevated this historically Black institution of higher education to an even greater level of prestige and recognition. *AFRO-AMERICAN*

These and other legislative initiatives that she pursued and achieved over the years demonstrates the sincerity of her commitment to public service.

It was the courage and conviction of Verda Welcome that inspired me and many others to public service. She was a pioneering force which encouraged and led the way for many African-Americans to enter politics. *APR. 28 1990*

The life of Verda Welcome has touched each and every one of our lives in some manner, and because she lived, we are all that much better off.

Verda Welcome was a very rare and special person whose compassion knew no boundaries, and her legacy will remain with us for all eternity.